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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001700

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PTER](#) [EAIR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: Persistence of Aviation-Related Gap in Border Controls

Ref: (A) Ankara 1386 (B) Paris 1925

Sensitive But Unclassified. Please Handle Accordingly.

[11](#). (U) This is an action cable. Please see paras 10 and [11](#).

Summary:

[12](#). (SBU) GOT and Turkish Airlines officials told us that, despite a recent decision to institute border and customs controls at the first airport of entry, the current gap in border security may persist into 2005. Turkish Airlines' Security Director told us the airline strongly supports creation of a air marshal program. Embassy urges Washington agencies to register USG concern over the glaring loophole in border controls through a letter or nonpaper to appropriate GOT officials. End Summary.

Gap in Immigration/Customs Control

[13](#). (SBU) Econoff discussed aviation security issues with Turkish Airlines (THY) Security Director Ahmet Kanik on March 11, and with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) Security Director Erdal Ugur on March [16](#). As reported reftel, the National Civil Aviation Security Council (NCASC) decided to take steps to return to a system requiring international passengers to clear customs and border control at the initial point of entry to Turkey, but renovations to enable passengers to claim and recheck their luggage at the international terminal at Istanbul Ataturk Airport must be completed first.

[14](#). (SBU) Kanik opined that the change would not happen anytime soon, since the NCASC had decided that a conveyor belt must be procured and installed at the international terminal so that passengers can recheck their baggage prior to walking to the domestic terminal for connecting flights. Kanik said the GOT has not budgeted for the equipment, which would cost about USD one million, and that, even if the funds were available, it could take as long as a year to get the new equipment and the new system up and running.

[15](#). (SBU) Kanik suggested that it would be preferable for the GOT to perform border controls for all incoming passengers at the initial port of entry, but allow passengers to clear customs at their final destinations. He said that, in any case, passengers would have to pass through the international terminals at their destination airports to claim their baggage, and for this reason would not avoid customs control. Note: The GOT previously implemented a split border and customs control regime as described by Kanik. End Note.

[16](#). (SBU) Kanik said he and the airline were extremely concerned about the current system, which de facto leaves the decision to go through border controls up to the connecting passenger. When Econoff noted that the USG was also concerned about the problem and had raised it with GOT officials many times, Kanik suggested that a written communication with the GOT was more likely to yield results.

17. (SBU) Ugur largely confirmed Kanik's account of the NCASC decision on this issue. He said that the GOT aimed to complete a feasibility study by the end of 2004, and to implement renovations by the end of 2005, but noted that the GOT would do everything possible to complete at least the feasibility study within the next few months. He acknowledged that no funds had been budgeted for the renovation, and said the GOT was examining ways of obtaining the necessary resources. Ugur stated that the GOT might opt to return to a split border/customs control regime if the renovations could not be completed swiftly.

Air Marshals

18. (SBU) Kanik told us that THY is very supportive of the concept of putting armed law enforcement officers (LEOs) on flights, and suggested training and deploying 25 two-person teams for this program. At the NCASC meeting, THY offered the GOT two free seats (one in business class and one in economy) on selected flights for LEOs. According to Kanik, the NCASC put off a decision on this matter by tasking out feasibility studies. Ugur told us that a key element of these studies is an examination of air marshal programs elsewhere. He reiterated previous GOT requests for background on the U.S. program (ref A).

Comment/Action Request

19. (SBU) Turkey's current system, which allows anyone transferring from an international to a domestic flight within Turkey to avoid border and customs checks, could be exploited by terrorist and criminal elements. While we have raised this issue repeatedly, up to the ministerial level, the GOT is moving slowly. Embassy strongly recommends that Washington agencies consider some form of written correspondence, such as a letter from the TSA Administrator to the Interior Minister on this subject.

110. (SBU) Embassy appreciates ref B's preliminary response on our air marshal program and looks forward to receiving information which we can pass to the GOT.
Edelman